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TAM-Soviet-Cuba;260

MOSCOW (AP) - The Soviet news agency ridiculed a U.S. claim that the Soviet Union has based 2,000 to 3,000 combat troops in Cuba but the Tass report Monday, the first Soviet comment on the matter, did not deny the assertion.

Tass political analyst Yevgeny Babenko focused his comments on Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who said last Thursday that U.S. intelligence sources had confirmed the presence of the Soviet troops.

Babenko's commentary said sarcastically that Church had somehow developed ''striking distance vision.''

Cuba, now hosting a conference of non-aligned nations, declined comment on the Church allegations except to say they were made to embarrass Cuba at the conference.

The State Department substantiated Church's statement, saying new intelligence estimates ''come to the unambiguous conclusion'' that there is now a Soviet combat brigade on the Caribbean island.

Ignoring Church's reference to intelligence sources, Babenko charged the senator ''was able to see without any optical devices what different U.S. services were unable to spot.''

The Tass commentator said it was ''particularly noteworthy'' that Church's statement came on the eve of the opening of the non-aligned conference in Havana.

''The fanning up of speculative rumors about 'Soviet troops in Cuba' . . . was needed to mislead delegates to the representative international forum in the Cuban capital and to blunt its anti-imperialist spearhead,'' Tass said.

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